THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN) : (a) to (c). The Standing Conference of Public Enterprises, a society registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860, has made various suggestions including giving full autonomy and operational freedom of decision making to Chief Executives of Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). Taking various measures to improve the functioning of PSUs, including grant of greater autonomy, is a continuous process, and Government have been granting greater powers in respect of financial, personnel and operational matters to the managements of PSUs from time to time.

Impact on Production of Rubber and Coconut due to Import Policy

*339. SHRI N.K. PREMCHANDRAN : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are aware that the liberalised import policy is likely to affect the rubber and coconut production adversely particularly in Kerala;

(b) whether the Government propose to review the decision of liberalised import policy;

(c) whether the Government also propose to exempt rubber products and coconut value added products from the purview of liberalised import policy; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) At present nothing has come to the notice of Government that may give rise to such apprehension.

(b) to (d). There is no such proposal under consideration at present. However, review of the Export and Import Policy is a continuous process and changes in it are made from time to time as and when considered necessary in the public interest.

Support Prices of Spices

*340. SHRI RAMESH CHENNITHALA : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether there has been a decline in the prices of most of the spices during the last three years;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether there is any proposal to fix support price for spices;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) and (b). There has been a mixed trend in the movement of prices of spices during the last three years. A statement indicating movement of Wholesale Price Indeed (WPI) of spices and condiments is given below :

Annual Average Wholesale Price Index (WPI) of Spices (1981-82 = 100)

Commodity	1993	1994	1995	1996*
Black Papper	243.4	465.1	538.8	552.5
Dry Chillies	174.1	216.2	355.9	424.7
Turmeric	599.6	458.7	426.3	623.5
Ginger	371.1	500.3	741.5	615.9
Cardamom	1599.7	1007.2	789.1	838.8
Cummin Seed	707.9	393.2	399.3	550.3
Garlic	560.7	965.8	509.4	374.2
Spices & Condiments	474.5	419.4	442.9	501.5

* Ten months average (Jan-Oct., 1996) and provisional

(c) No, Sir.

(d) Does not arise.

(e) In order to ensure remunerative price to the growers of the spices the Government has brought spices under the Market Intervention Scheme. Under the Scheme, market operations are undertaken, when prices fall to uneconomic levels, on the specific request from the State Government for a Specific commodity, for a certain period and for a specific quantity at a fixed price. The Central nodal agency i.e., National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation and state designated agencies make purchases generally in equal proportion and also share losses, if any, in the same proportion.

Expenditure on Ministers

3115. SHRI B.L. SHARMA PREM : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether any ceilings has been fixed in respect of the expenditure incurred by the Ministers on telephone calls in their offices and residences as well as on fittings and furnishings of their offices and residences;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) if not, the reasons therefor; and

(d) the action taken in the cases where these ceilings are crossed?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : (a) to (c). Having regard to the functional and operational considerations, no limit has been prescribed on the number of telephone calls made from the office and residential telephones of Ministers.

In respect of furnishing of office and office portion of the residence of a Minister, a ceiling of Rs. 45,000/- has been prescribed. Further, in terms of the Ministers Residences' Rules, 1962, the value of furniture and electrical appliances provided free of rent at the residence of a Minister shall not exceed Rs. 38,500 in

case of a Minister and Rs. 22,500/- in case of a Deputy Minister. The Minister concerned is charged the prescribed rent for the furniture supplied over and above the prescribed ceiling.

(d) Appropriate action is required to be taken by the administrative Ministry concerned in terms of the existing instructions.

Telecom Sector

3116. SHRI MANIKRAO HODLYA GAVIT : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether United State has once again stepped up pressure on India over trade issue by urging the Dispute Settlement Body of the World Trade Organisations to set up a panel to look into non-fulfilment of commitments on the patents front even while adopting the bilateral route to seek further liberalisation of the Telecom sector;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the US has urged India to give an assurance that the liberalisation carried out so far would not be reversed in the case of telecom; and

(d) if so, what are the other commitments on regulatory issues apart from improving its NGBT offer in terms of opening up for foreign equity participation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) and (b). In pursuance of the provisions of Article 4 of the Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes (DSU) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Article 64 of the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, on 2 July 1996, the Government of the United States of America had sought consultations with India regarding the alleged absence in India of either patent protection for pharmaceutical and agricultural chemical products or formal systems that permit the filing of patent applications for such products and that permit the grant of exclusive marketing rights in such products. The consultations were held on 27 July 1996.

The DSU provides that the complaining party may request the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) of the WTO to establish a panel to examine the allegation if the consultations fail to settle the dispute within sixty days after the date of receipt of the request for consultations. In accordance with these provisions, on 7 November 1996 the USA requested the establishment of a panel to examine this dispute. The DSB, at its meeting held on 20 November 1996 considered this request and decided to establish a panel.

(c) The US has asked a number of countries including India to improve its NGBT offer in the negotiations which are stated to be completed by 15 February 1997 in the WTO in Geneva.

(d) India has not made any commitments on regulatory issues in NGBT.

[Translation]

Smuggling of Urea in India-Nepal Border

3117. SHRI CHINTAMAN WANAGA : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are aware of the large scale smuggling of urea taking place on Indo-Nepal Border;

(b) if so, the reaction of the Government thereto;

(c) the steps taken to check the same; and

(d) the action taken against the officers involved and responsible for the same?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : (a) to (d). Seizure statistics and intelligence reports do not indicate large scale smuggling of Urea on the Indo-Nepal border. However field formations are alert to prevent smuggling including smuggling of Urea on Indo-Nepal Border. No officer has been found involved in the smuggling of urea.

Top Importer Countries

3118. SHRI MUKHTAR ANIS : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) the details of top 10 importer countries of Indian goods recorded during 1995-96;

(b) the position of those countries in the list of exporters of goods to India during 1995-96; and

(c) the special efforts made by the Government for increasing export to those countries which have a favourable balance of trade with India during 1996-97?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) and (b). The position is indicated in the statement enclosed.

(c) During the current year, emphasis is laid on promotion of traditional as well as non traditional and value added exports to all countries including those which have favourable trade balance with India. Steps taken by the Government include improving bilateral trade relations through consultations and promotion of bilateral commercial alliances, special emphasis on quality improvements of exports, simplification of policies & procedures as required, involvement of States in export promotion efforts and launching of India Brand Equity to improve brand image for exports. Export promotion is a continuous activity and efforts being made in consultation with trade, industry and other export promotional organisations.